



# MY BODY, YOUR CHOICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NUANCE OF ONLYFANS TOWARD WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN

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## ABSTRACT

OnlyFans is a social media platform, created in 2016, to serve as a way for content creators to sell their content for a subscription. Now, it has evolved into one of the greatest modes of sexual commerce and the commodification of women. This study delves into the analysis of OnlyFans and its potential relationship to women's bodily autonomy, from a feminist lens. This study also investigates the history of sex work, and how feminist frameworks such as neo-abolitionist perspectives (Marxist and radical feminism) and liberal feminism alter the perceptions of people on sex work.

**KEYWORDS:** OnlyFans, Feminism Sex Work, Neo-Abolitionist Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Commodification

## INTRODUCTION

Amid a world of ethical ambiguity, lines are further blurred as consent and sexual autonomy are now available behind a paywall. This was made possible through a history of women participating in the commodification of their bodies and sexuality. However, it became further prevalent in the digitalization of society through OnlyFans, which is a social media platform that allows creators to distribute adult content to their followers, or "fans," with a subscription (Hove & Vlerick, 2021). However, there are more variations of content on the platform, as intimate interactions and exclusive content are available upon request, in exchange for a substantial price. Therefore, the varying facets of OnlyFans must be discussed as the capitalization of women's bodies, though self-enforced, still constrains genuine consent and further promotes the sexualization of women.

Besides distorting the ideologies of women's autonomy, OnlyFans commodifies feminism by reducing women's liberation to something that can be bought and sold. This further alters the perception of the youth toward feminist theories and intersectionality, as the trend of "Girlboss" encourages self-sexualization, labeling it liberal feminism despite its perpetuation of misogyny as it conforms to the system set by the patriarchy (Fabiya, 2022). Hence, it is necessary for this study to further explore the nuance of platforms such as OnlyFans through an analysis of existing content and literature, to determine their perception of women's autonomy and intersectionality in its attempts at feminist liberation.

However, despite the existing literature, there are still gaps to be addressed within the scope of this research. Though numerous studies discuss the prevalence of OnlyFans and its correlation to feminism, this study will explore the commodification of women through OnlyFans, by analyzing secondary data and perceptions of the phenomenon on social media platforms. Through this, the author will be able to determine its relationship to women's

autonomy and feminist theories while analyzing the perception of the youth in the given digital spaces. In addition, this paper aims to answer the question, "How has the commodification of women through platforms like OnlyFans further driven or constrained feminist liberation and sexual autonomy?"

Such exploration must be considered because, in the varying facets of women's liberation, OnlyFans creates a complex blend of empowerment and exploitation as its ethical ambiguity distorts women's autonomy while commodifying feminism, altering the youth's perception of intersectionality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The prevalence of sex work did not begin with OnlyFans, with the term being first discovered by Carol Leigh in the 1970s to describe the labor performed in commercial sex industries by women like her (Berg, 2014). However, sex work extends beyond the term, as it is one of the oldest professions in the history of civilization. Before the creation of this term, prostitution was its primary descriptor. According to a study by Bhat (2022), the phenomenon began more than 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, wherein priestesses would offer sexual services as a fertility or religious rite. The concept of offering one's sexuality in exchange for power, salvation, or nowadays, money, has long been a source of moral ambiguity and ethical concern. However, in the 21st century, sex work has extended beyond religious rites. Given the rise of social media, the commodification of sexuality has also become increasingly prevalent online, as the sex market has adapted to online platforms such as OnlyFans (Vlerick & Hove, 2021). In this paper, Vlerick & Hove (2021) discuss the impact of OnlyFans on sex workers, since the platform provides sexually explicit content and live streams from sex workers through a subscription. However, unlike the historical definition of sex work and prostitution, OnlyFans allows an increased level of interaction between the content creator and the user. Through special tips and requests, the platform establishes a sense of

relationship and trust between the two parties where love and intimacy can be nurtured, or simulated.

On the other hand, from the feminist lens, OnlyFans creates division among the different feminist theories. Based on a study by Mesce (2020), in the framework of abolitionist feminism, which was defined by Kathryn Abrams, sex work and the perpetuation of this image of women further contributed to the degradation of women in other industries, especially in their field of work. This theory, which was heavily inspired by dominance feminism, dictates that freedom and sex are on two opposite sides of a spectrum, wherein women cannot have one and the other. Meanwhile, liberal feminist frameworks posit a different stance as they support two approaches by the law: legalization and decriminalization. This feminist theory supports policies that legalize most forms of sex work, such as prostitution, pimping, brothel ownership, and more, while protecting sex workers with the same rights as those in other industries. Liberal feminism also stands for the decriminalization of sex work, which is defined as the extinction of penalties against the prostitution industry (Mesce, 2020). However, criticisms of these feminist perspectives often stem from their lack of inclusivity and intersectionality. In Mesce (2020), she argues that intersectionality plays a significant role in the representation of feminism, as despite women of color being the primary victims of sex work and trafficking, most feminist dialogues fail to account for their experiences. This was further affirmed by Gerassi (2016), as her study discusses the implications of intersectionality in the studies of sex work and violence against women. This framework notes the differences between the experiences of women not only based on their gender but as well as their race, class, sexual orientation, or other identity.

Though the aforementioned literature discusses the commodification of women and the feminist perspectives related to sex work, there are particular gaps that this research will address. By employing a secondary data analysis, this research will be able to provide significant knowledge to future researchers. This can also benefit policymakers as this study discusses the nuance of sex work platforms, which may give them a better sense of the legalities of OnlyFans and contemporary forms of prostitution. Most of all, this study will benefit women as a whole by discussing the influence of OnlyFans on different feminist theories and how it completely distorts the idea of feminism.

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methods of data collection and analysis to be conducted in this study. It will also discuss the specific parameters of this paper and the justifications for the aforementioned methods.

### Data Collection

This study will employ a secondary data analysis that aims to answer the question, "How has the commodification of women through platforms like OnlyFans further driven or constrained feminist liberation and sexual autonomy?" This method of data collection is based on knowledge that the use of secondary data is more cost-effective and time-efficient than

other methods. Thus, given the limitations of this research, the most appropriate method of data collection is a secondary data analysis with systematic forms of analysis and interpretation to prevent bias. This study will conduct the analysis with a single-lens approach, using the feminist lens by referencing particular feminist theories to create valid conclusions.

Furthermore, to prevent the collection of unreliable data and consequently, false or biased results, there will be a set of criteria used to strictly gather relevant and credible data. The following criteria will ensure the credibility and relevance of the secondary data to be used:

1. The source must be published in a known research database, preferably JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar.
2. The source must be published within 2014-2024 and must be peer-reviewed.
3. The source must discuss OnlyFans: User Experience, Content Creators, Ethical Standards
4. The source must report its data through methods such as surveys and/or interviews

### Limitations

Despite the utmost objectivity that will be maintained throughout the procedures of this study, there are notable limitations to secondary data analysis. First, given the secondary approach of the study, the results will be heavily based on the works of previous researchers, which could posit certain biases. Furthermore, it could also provide different interpretations, as results from 2014 may be different from the results in 2024, given the changes in context. Thus, all of these limitations will be considered throughout the analysis of the gathered data, and all ethical standards will be followed to create objective and reliable results.

## RESULTS

This chapter will outline the results and findings of the secondary data analysis conducted for this research. It discusses how the commodification of feminism through OnlyFans is evident by interpreting data based on a feminist lens.

### Data Analysis

Before the presentation of the results of this data analysis, this research will first define the approach used to examine these sources. Through the feminist lens, two frameworks were held most significant in terms of the parameters of this study. First, is the neo-abolitionist perspective, which covers both Radical and Marxist Feminism, while the second is Liberal Feminism. As a contemporary root for neo-abolitionist perspectives, radical feminism believes that society is inherently patriarchal, wherein they also argue that the tenet of sexual commerce rests in male domination and the power imbalance between men and women (Gerassi, 2016). Likewise, Marxist feminism generally views sex work as violence against women as well, which posits that women's oppression is because of their economic dependence on men in a patriarchal society (Gerassi, 2016). Meanwhile, liberal feminism, as defined in Chapter I, takes a more sex-positive stance, wherein it advocates for the legalization and decriminalization of sex work policies.

### User Perspectives of OnlyFans

Upon gathering a number of sources from renowned research databases, the perspectives of users were found to be distinct across various sources. In a study by Lippmann et al. (2022), they investigated the learning experience of OnlyFans users through a survey that investigated how much they were able to learn or adapt knowledge from their use of OnlyFans. The figure below shows the respective mean scores for each question. However, as interpreted by the authors, the majority of participants reported learning outcomes in each of these domains (Lippmann et al., 2022). They were able to conclude that, as they investigated the users' perception of the impact of OnlyFans on their sexual lives and learnings, users rated its effect as more positive than negative.

**Table 1** Descriptive Quantitative Questions and Results

Question	Response Scale	Results
1 How has your OnlyFans use influenced your sexual life? (With partners, by yourself, etc.)	-3 (extremely negatively) – +3 (extremely positively)	$M=1.23$ $Md=1.00$ $SD=1.27$
2 To what extent have you learned anything new about sexual practices in general on OnlyFans?	1 (learned nothing new) – 7 (learned many new things)	$M=4.86$ $Md=5.00$ $SD=1.83$
3 To what extent have you learned anything new about your personal sexual preferences on OnlyFans?	1 (learned nothing new) – 7 (learned many new things)	$M=4.88$ $Md=5.00$ $SD=1.82$
4 To what extent have you learned anything new about relationships on OnlyFans?	1 (learned nothing new) – 7 (learned many new things)	$M=4.63$ $Md=5.00$ $SD=1.89$
5 To what extent have you learned anything new about sexual health on OnlyFans?	1 (learned nothing new) – 7 (learned many new things)	$M=4.68$ $Md=5.00$ $SD=1.84$
6 To what extent have you tried anything new due to using OnlyFans (Examples: life changes, sexual practices, relationship practices, self-exploration)?	1 (tried nothing new) – 7 (tried many new things)	$M=4.88$ $Md=5.00$ $SD=1.71$

Source: Lippmann et al. (2022)

**Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics of User Learnings on OnlyFans**

Furthermore, in terms of demographics, a study conducted by Litam et al. (2022), found that out of a total of 718 participants in their survey, OnlyFans users were predominantly married, white males. They also determined the sexual attitudes of their participants with the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale, or BSAS (Hendrick et al., 2006), which measured it through four subscales. These include permissiveness, regarding premarital sex and similar questions; birth control, regarding the responsibility of birth control between men and women; communion, regarding the emotional connection evoked by sex; and instrumentality, regarding the purpose and function of sex (Litam et al., 2022). Through this survey, they found that there is no statistically significant difference between the sexual attitudes of OnlyFans users and non-users.

Sex	Status	N	Permissiveness		Communion		Instrumentality		Birth control	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Female	Nonuser	27	3.55	0.62	3.67	0.72	3.64	0.60	3.49	.70
	User	127	3.83	0.68	4.05	0.54	3.99	0.53	3.89	.65
Male	Nonuser	62	3.71	0.55	3.80	0.54	3.78	0.50	3.73	.64
	User	217	3.80	0.59	3.92	0.57	3.90	0.59	3.87	.67

Source: Litam et al. (2022)

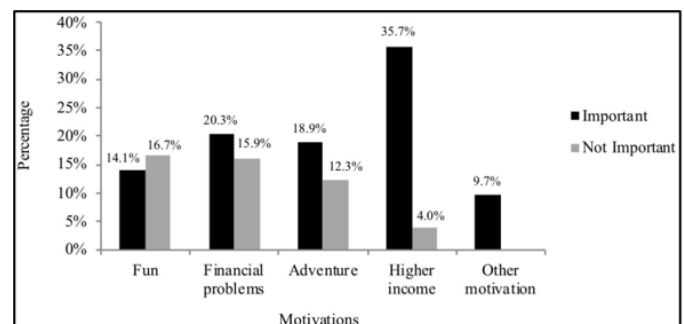
**Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics of Sexual Attitudes of OnlyFans Users and Non-Users**

In analyzing the user attitudes and knowledge of those who consume content from OnlyFans, these two sources both generate results that lead to an inference about the normality of OnlyFans users. From a neo-abolitionist perspective, the

demographic being predominantly male points to structural inequality between genders, as men continue to perpetuate the capitalistic system that benefits from the sexualization of women. Based on the framework of radical feminism by Nielsen (2023), these users must be penalized for their participation in treating women or OnlyFans creators as sex objects. Hence, based on a generalization of the given data, most white males would be criminalized for their consumption of OnlyFans content. Meanwhile, liberal feminism would believe otherwise, as they believe in women's complete bodily autonomy, ergo they have the choice to do whatever they choose for their bodies, including sex work. Thus, this feminist theory stands against the criminalization of these OnlyFans users, as it aims to define sex work like any other profession (Nielsen, 2023).

### The Commodification of Women through OnlyFans

Beyond the legal ambiguity of OnlyFans and sex work, it is widely considered taboo in society. Thus, the motivations of creators and sex workers as a whole have been debated and long discussed in feminist discourse. However, throughout this secondary data analysis, financial liberation and economic opportunity were among the most prevalent sources of motivation for OnlyFans creators. In a study by Ernst et al. (2022), the survey they conducted reported that the most important motivator for sex workers, who were students, is higher income, with 35% of participants noting it as important.



Source: Ernst et al. (2022)

**Figure 3: Percentage of motivations students reported being important or not important.**

In addition, the gathered data consisted of interviews to learn the experiences of OnlyFans creators. There were varying opinions on their bodily autonomy working as an OnlyFans creator. Some interviewees were able to see that their work primarily focuses on pleasing men and being sexual objects under them, especially if they pay for certain services. This, in turn, creates a certain ethical ambiguity as their behaviors are controlled by men (Heister, 2024). Furthermore, in Halvorsen (2022), the interviewees discussed the reality of how their bodies are more highly sexualized in comparison to male bodies. When asked about their opinions regarding this, one of the interviewees perceived it as strange while noting that it is a pleasant opportunity to gain economically with their bodies. Many interviews consist of women validating their decision to work at OnlyFans, considering it an act of feminist liberation and taking control of their own bodies.

At its very core, OnlyFans highlights freedom of choice and



bodily autonomy among women. This is also how it is widely perceived by different creators and users, contributing to the frameworks of liberal feminism wherein sex work is a symbol of feminist liberty as women have the ability to gain economic freedom by selling their bodies. However, from neo-abolitionist perspectives such as radical and Marxist feminism, the creation of OnlyFans would be a complete abomination against feminist ideologies. While creators are under the impression of being in control, they are truly under the objectification of men, as they heavily rely on male validation for financial independence. Radical feminists would believe that OnlyFans creators are victims of sexualization, as their entire livelihoods revolve around pleasing men and gaining their attention. Likewise, Marxist feminists would argue that the dependence of these creators on gaining income from male users further deepens the inequality between genders, and perpetuates a male-centric society and economy.

## DISCUSSION

In light of the presented information, this chapter aims to interpret the results of the method of data collection employed in this study and answer the research question based on the given findings, in order to generate a valid and justifiable conclusion.

At the beginning of this study, a research question was formulated to be answered by the end of the research process. The question is as follows: “How has the commodification of women through platforms like OnlyFans further driven or constrained feminist liberation and sexual autonomy?” Because of the nuance of this topic and the differences in perception, especially from various feminist frameworks, the results will be presented from two different perspectives, as used in the data analysis: neo-abolitionist perspectives (Marxist and radical feminism) and liberal feminism.

Based on the data collected from the user perspectives of OnlyFans, it would state that these participants are predominantly white males who enjoy similar sexual attitudes as those who do not use OnlyFans. From the neo-abolitionist perspective, these users are perpetrators of the patriarchal inequality between men and women, which must be criminalized as they are victimizing OnlyFans creators by subjecting them to sexualization in exchange for profit. Meanwhile, the liberal perspective would argue that it is all completely normal and legal, so long as they abide by labor policies in place for other industries. This is because they see the sex commerce industry as any other industry, despite how it has been dismissed by other feminist frameworks, scholars, and global media (Nielsen, 2023).

On the other hand, the commodification of women through OnlyFans, which was analyzed through the experiences of OnlyFans creators, would create further debate and discussion regarding its moral ambiguity and contribution to feminism. Whether it drives or constrains feminist liberation, the creators provided significant anecdotes stating that they believe their careers provide them with feminist freedom and financial gain. Essentially, by selling their bodies, they believe that it promotes feminist liberation as it highlights their bodily autonomy and ability to use their bodies for financial freedom. This further

promotes the ideals of liberal feminism, however, from a neo-abolitionist perspective, it proves the opposite.

In radical and Marxist feminism, there is an inherent system in society that prevents women from truly being free, as the system only benefits men (Heister, 2024). These responses from the OnlyFans creators only prove how dependent these women are on male validation and sexualization. This further deepens the frameworks of radical feminism, as female sex workers, especially those in OnlyFans, are greatly motivated by economic gain and are subjected to pleasing men for survival (Heister, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the commodification of women through OnlyFans does not necessarily drive nor constrain feminist liberation, at least for now. From a neo-abolitionist perspective, OnlyFans as a whole is misogynistic and a clear showcase of a male-centric society that infringes on women's rights. However, liberal feminism defends that OnlyFans promotes bodily autonomy and a sense of sexual identity to creators while providing them with a decent profit. However, the progression of the sexualization of women may result in future consequences, good or bad. Thus, this study recommends further research, especially using methods of interviews and surveys, to determine the ethical considerations surrounding OnlyFans as well as its relationship to feminist theories. Though this research was limited in time and resources, leading to secondary data analysis and data collection, there was still significant knowledge provided as neo-abolitionist and liberal feminism were compared in the context of OnlyFans, while the commodification of women was determined through the use of credible existing data. Therefore, this research calls on women as a whole to determine the nuance of sex work on autonomy and feminism.

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